separa are memorised, i.e. from the 90th to the 114th *sura*. These verses are recited when praying. Only occasionally parts or verses of the Koran are translated or explained for the children. They learn to read, mostly without really understanding it.

Direct teaching (i.e. the teacher is speaking while the students are listening) is the dominant method and often regarded as an expression of respect for the teacher. Respect for teachers is mandatory and the teacher (i.e. the *mullah)* is usually highly respected for his knowledge (but there are also many good jokes about *mullahs*!). The children are also respected; to be kind and decent to children is regarded as an Islamic obligation. When teaching Islamic morals the *mullah* uses a book titled *Panj kitab* (Five books) in Dari and when translated into Pashto called *Rashid Bayan* (Rashid's exposition). These books are also used for learning how to read. When writing is taught in the Islamic school it is done through copying what the teacher has written or by imitating a book. Simple arithmetic is often taught as well. Later on, students may also, learn how to set up contracts or papers of agreement, following the commonly agreed rules for such documents. Such contract and agreement letters are compiled in a "book" called *Mulatefa,* which consists of a series of paper sheets clipped at the end to the next one in a progressive degree of difficulty (Rafi 1998). The student reads, repeats, writes, memorises, copies until he masters them, one at a time.

Learning in the Mosque School (as in most educational settings in Afghanistan) is a passive act. One can, however, find *mullahs* with inborn pedagogical talents who adapt their teaching to the children's level. Older children often teach the younger ones. The children take turns in being taught by the mullah. The children learn the rituals of praying, the Islamic five pillars, good manners and habits, and some of the ethics that the *mullah* considers to be consistent with Islam. The *mullah* is usually a very respected person but there are examples of *mullahs* whose reputation is not so good or whose knowledge is poor. People complain - sometimes loudly - about mullahs who are not punctual or who are unkind to the children and it sometimes happens that they are dismissed.

Traditional Madrasas have a long history. The boy students, the *taliban*[11], learn from a broader spectrum of religious subjects and only religious subjects, including *Fiqha (*rights and duties, logic and reason) and the Arabic language. The students are usually highly motivated and often dedicate many years for their studies.

[11] *Talib* is a student of Islam, *taliban* is the plural form.

In most villages and also in the cities traditional *madrasas* exist. The local community is responsible for running the school. Traditional *madrasas* have always been a community affair and villagers did often not perceive the difference between them and Modern *Madrasas*. Students attend on irregular and individual basis; they decide themselves at what pace they might wish to learn and for how long. They can walk long distances to attend a special madrasa with a famous teacher. Also in Traditional Madrasas the education is free. They study the *tafsir*, interpretations of Islam, at lower levels the one that is valid in Afghanistan but in higher *madrasa* training the curriculum includes study of other interpretations as well. They study the *hadiths* and the *sira,* i.e. the sayings by the Prophet Mohammed and his life-stories. A major subject is the *figha,* Islamic duties, rights, and rituals. They study *tawhid*, the unity of God, and they learn rhetoric and logic (Socrates) as well as Arabic and Persian literature. (Sharif 1987). A good student might pass through and complete the entire training in ten years in such a school.

Less ambitious and smaller traditional madrasas exist all over the country. They are boarding institutions and students from different villages attend the school and live together. The aim with the traditional *madrasa* is to provide for the specialists an Islamic society needs, or, in other words, to produce masters in Islamic theology and law. A student graduates from the *madrasa* after completing a certain number of books in the different subjects and through a special ceremony the student is acknowledged as *Maulawi* or *Alim*, and is then authorised to work also as judge, as well as imam and mullah. Anyone, who has studied Islam, can become *imam* or *mullah*, but to become judge or lawyer a particular training is stipulated by the government. Principally, only graduates from the Sharia Faculty of the University are allowed to work as judges but graduates from traditional second level madrasas have also been approved and permitted to work as judges.

Few continue to the second level of the traditional madrasa and only few such schools have ever existed, some 15 to 20, less than one per province. The training aims at producing *imams* and *mullahs*, missionaries and teachers and maintaining the high status of the Islamic learned person. In addition, nine governmentally run second level madrasas have existed. The curriculum in those schools was fixed and decided by the government, it consisted of seven grades and when graduating after grade 12 students were allowed to enter into the faculties of Sharia and Law of Kabul University. The aim of governmental madrasas and Islamic education at the

University was to produce judges, governmental cadre and teachers for Islamic schools.

Girls have always been excluded from formal Islamic education. After the elementary instruction they get in the Mosque Schools their opportunity to get Islamic education is only through attending the primary school - if there is any and if offered to girls students. Consequently, on strong grounds one can assume that girls and women in Afghanistan have a much more limited Islamic knowledge than boys and men have unless their father, husband or brothers have taught them at home, something which actually is quite common. The few women with some type of University training are exceptions. Those at these institutions often attended Islamic classes and constituted a considerable share of the students at the Faculty of Sharia, following a training that aimed at producing the necessary female teachers in Islamic subjects in primary and secondary schools for girls.

That the female literacy rate in Afghanistan is so extremely low (also compared to other Muslim countries) has no support in Islam. According to Islam the man and the woman have the same obligation for and the same right to education and both are obliged to learn about Islam, expressed in the Koran as well as in the *hadiths*. The famous *sura* 21, verse no 7 in the Koran says: "If you don't know, you must ask and find out from *alim*" (= those who know). One famous *hadith* says: "To seek knowledge is *farz* (obligatory for man and woman). Another saying is from the *figha*: "There is no excuse for those who claim that he/she does not know "[12]

The ***Modern Madrasa School*** is a boarding school for some 50 -100 boy students aged 10 – 15 years. Before the wars, i.e. in the 1960s and 1970s there were very few such *madrasas,* but from the 1980s and even more so in the Taliban period (1994-2001) an expansion took place. The Islamic revival during the Jihad, the liberation war against the Soviet occupation 1979 - 1989, prepared the ground for the rehabilitation of Modern *Madrasas*. Another reason was the decline of primary schools. Many school buildings were destroyed by the war, but even if the school remained intact the number of students decreased as parents withdrew their children from the Communist influenced teaching during this period. During the Taliban government Modern *Madrasas* were the only form of education encouraged by the government.

[12] These quotations are frequently used to convince conservative *mullahs* about girls' right to education.

In the Modern *Madrasa* several mullahs are teaching. The subjects are the Koran and other Islamic scripts, Islamic ethics and in addition, subjects of the ordinary primary school (the reason why we label this education Modern Madrasa). Students pass through the six grades during nine months per year. Each day has a timetable of 4-6 hours and more than 50 per cent of the time is spent on religious subjects. With the Modern *Madrasa* the Taliban aimed at educating students with a correct and strict (= Taliban) view on Islam while simultaneously training them in modern subjects and thus making them able to compete with what was called the secular school students. That is why also subjects such as English sometimes were included - if any teacher was available. The mullah-teachers are sometimes from the village but as often from other areas and have usually graduated long ago from a higher degree of Islamic education. During the last years of the Taliban regime also younger teachers were working in the Modern Madrasas, young Afghans trained in Pakistani madrasas[13].

During the Taliban period there were special governmental grants for the students in Modern *Madrasas*. The school was located in simple buildings constructed by the villagers and financed by a wealthy individual (inside or outside Afghanistan) or by the government. Many students were lodged in homes of the villagers, who also provided food for the students. The fact that food was served was sometimes a reason for poor students to attend the Modern *Madrasa*.

If there is a primary school in the village parents usually prefer that kind of education for their children but some still choose the *madrasa*, as it provides a more profound Islamic education. It still happens that parents regard primary education as godless and as a work of *Shaitan.* Some primary school students also attend the *madrasa* if they have the opportunity. Children often walk a long distance to the primary school but when it is too far away, they may enrol in a distant madrasa; in so doing they will get food and lodging and access to a primary school too. With the fall of the Taliban many of these Modern *Madrasas* have closed down.

Arabic schools in the Afghan context are (a few) schools supported by Saudi Arabia and by some individual Arabs. They appeared first in the refugee camps in the 1980s, some of which had exclusively Islamic education and others with a curriculum mixture of 'modern' and Islamic subjects. Inside Afghanistan there are also a few Arabic schools for male orphans.

[13] It has not been heard of arms training in the Modern Madrasas in Afghanistan, which has been

Modern[14] education

Free and compulsory primary schooling[15] was introduced in Afghanistan as far back as 1935. Primary education in Afghanistan covers grades 1-6, i.e. for children of age seven to eight to thirteen to fourteen years. The first modern school - for boys only - was established in Kabul in 1903. After 1919, schools were established also outside Kabul. The first girl school was instituted in 1921. Some students (male and female) were sent for higher education to Turkey[16], Germany and France. German and French support to education was not only financial; the school curriculum and the school uniforms of these countries were copied into Afghan education. In 1930, there were, in all, thirteen primary schools in the country with 1,590 students (Mansory, 2000). In the 1950s, the education sector expanded rapidly. In 1956, there were 126,000 students enrolled (Ministry of Education, 1968, cited in Mansory, 2000). The constitution of 1964 guaranteed free education for all but only limited possibilities for implementation were at hand. In 1975, around 900,000 students were enrolled; about 80 per cent of these were pupils in primary school (Ghani 1990, cited in Christensen 1995). In 1990, the number of primary schools was 1,200 - less than in 1978 - and during the nineties the situation continued to deteriorate. Already in 1983, the war had destroyed 50 per cent of the schools (ibid.).

From the 1950s also girls' education expanded rapidly – in the cities. In 1955, there were girl schools in seven provincial capitals (out of 29) while in the rural areas, very few such schools existed. At the end of the 1970s, around one third of all children were enrolled in primary schools - of whom seven per cent were girls.

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recorded from madrasa schools in Pakistan.

[14] What is here called 'modern' is elsewhere often called 'Western'. As Afghanistan never has been colonised, modern education was not introduced by a colonial (Western) power (but has nevertheless now and then been regarded as a foreign intrusion). Neither can modern education be labelled secular in Afghanistan. Modern education is not and has never been secular in Afghanistan; Islam is a state religion and Islam is an important part also of the 'modern' school curriculum.

[15] Primary education in Afghanistan covers grade 1-6, i.e. for children of age 7-8 to 13-14 years.

[16] The first graduates of the first girl school were sent to Turkey to get higher education in nursing, an event that caused a lot of discontent among religious leaders. Education for girls experienced soon a severe backlash, most girl schools closed down in the 30s and did not recover until the beginnings of the 1950s.

In Kabul, however, girls constituted 35 per cent of all students. (Ghani, 1990 and Kraus, 1994 cited in Cristensen, 1995.) A majority of the children in primary schools dropped out after grade three (Daun, 1990). In rural areas there were still very few - in many areas not any - girl schools until the *Mujaheddin* set up schools for girls in the 1980s with support of NGOs, mainly the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA).

The Taliban ban (1996 - 2001) on girls' education mainly affected girl schools in the cities. In rural areas where 80 - 90 per cent of the Afghan population live, this edict was not enforced and a large number of schools for girls appeared, often with financial support from the local community. Anyway, the total enrolment rate for girls decreased in the country during the 1990s as an effect of closure of city schools for girls, but also due to low priority among ordinary Afghans to this type of education, and not least, due to the security situation and parental concern of safety for the girls.

From the eighties and up to 2002 only few educational services were provided by governmental authorities. In spring 2002 education was proclaimed a national priority but still the main providing actors were the international NGOs. The biggest NGO, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan enrolled around 250 000 students in March 2002. It is estimated that less than 25 per cent of all school-aged children had access to school (with a primary school age population estimated to more than four million children). According to SCA School Statistics the percentage of girls constituted 25 per cent of all students.

The quality of teaching and learning is generally low as a result of low qualified teachers; the few professionally trained teachers (10-15 per cent) graduated more than 20 years ago. In addition, the teacher force is aging. Albeit financially supported by foreign NGOs it is common that local authorities and/or local communities appoint the teachers - although according to standards set by the NGO. “Chalk and talk" is the dominant teaching method. When Islamic subjects are taught the students are even more passive listeners - the teacher reads and the students memorize. The examination system includes two tests per school year; the tests are produced by the individual teachers and are not standardized.

Traditionally, teachers have been highly respected in the Afghan society, something that slowly has changed during the last years. Teachers as many other educated people belong today to the poorest layers and as such their status have declined. Teachers are paid by the NGOs usually with additional contribution from the communities but still not enough to support a large family.

The curriculum adhered to by the NGOs has been the one adopted by the short-lived *mujaheddin* government in 1992. The school year includes nine months with six days per week and four-five hours per day. The textbooks have been a controversial issue. The books printed during *Jihad* were mostly financed by an American NGO and included an abundance of fighting and resistance messages, glorifying the soldier and his weapons. After 1994, new books, excluding the war and including peace messages were introduced. In the late nineties several NGOs agreed on more pedagogically developed textbooks. Islam and Islamic messages have all the time constituted a substantial amount of the text in most subjects. The Taliban regime tried to impose a new curriculum with more religion on the timetable (see table 1) but this was hardly successful. They also rejected the NGO textbooks and tried to introduce the books used in traditional madrasas, written in Arabic. As can be seen in the below table the hours per week dedicated to religious subjects constitute the main difference when comparing the pre-war schools, the Communist timetable, the NGO supported schools, the Taliban education and the recent timetable introduced by the interim government in June 2002.

Table 1 Changes in Governments and Weekly Time Tables in Afghanistan

	Daud Gov:t, 1960-1978		Communist Govt 1978-1990		NGOs (SCA), 1984-2001 a)		Taliban Gov:t, 1996-2001 b)		Interim Gov:t, 2002 - c)	
Grades	1-3	4-6	1-3	4-6	1-3	4-6	1-3	4-6	1-3	4-6
Subject										
Holy Koran	2	2	1	1	6	6	6	5	1	2
Religion	2	3	0	1	6	4	5	11	2	2
Mathematics	4	5	6	6	6	6	6	4	5	4
First language	12	5	12	4	9	4	6	5	10	7
Second language	0	4	0	2	0	3	0	3	0	4
History	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Geography	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Natural science	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2
Calligraphy	4	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	2
Drawing (Art)	3	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	2
Music	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sport	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	1
Manual work	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	28	30	25	26	30	32	23	30	24	30

a) Curriculum introduced by the Mujaheddin Government in 1989; b) Curriculum introduced in 1999, but very seldom applied in NGO supported schools, c) Curriculum introduced by the Interim Administration in 2002 and taken over by the Transitional Government the same year

Sources: Teaching program for primary schools issued by Temporary Mujaheeden government 1989, Ministry of Education 2001 (Taliban), 2002 (Interim Administration)

As can be seen in table 1, the Interim Administration of 2002 has decreased religious subjects to only four hours per week in grade 4-6, as compared to ten in NGO supported schools and sixteen in the Taliban schools. Before the wars, in the 1970s Islamic subjects constituted four to five hours per week. Interestingly, also the "Communist" schools also taught a couple of hours of Islam per week. In NGO-supported schools textbooks on Islam (with the exception of the Koran) are written in Dari and Pashto, while all textbooks in Taliban schools were in Arabic. The covered topics are similar to those in madrasas, i.e. reading and memorising the Koran, learning about the Islamic five pillars, praying, and not least, Islamic values and morals.

Continuos conflict or complementary wholeness of the Islamic and modern education systems?

From an educational perspective, three issues have been at core in many upheavals and rebellions in Afghanistan throughout modern history: i) the role of Islam in education, ii) education for girls and iii) governmental (state) control of Islamic education.

During the reform programme of the 1920s launched by King Amanullah many of the new ideas were tolerated at first but when the government also sought to control all kinds of Islamic education the cup was full to the brim. The second level governmentally financed madrasas were in many aspects organised as secondary schools with timetables and curriculum, examination system and grades. Two such schools were first established in Kabul. The reform programme also included a certification system (i.e. that governmental authorities should approve all madrasas and their mullah-teachers before any teaching would be allowed). With graduates from governmental madrasas the king intended to set up a proficiency system for *imams*, *mullahs* and *maulawis*. On this and other points he met strong resistance from particularly rural conservative *mullahs* and he had finally to resign and into exile. Another, maybe an equally important reason for the king's resignation was the introduction of girls' education (where the girls were dressed in European school uniforms, blue skirts and white blouses). After the king's resignation, girl schools closed down but governmental madrasas remained and later on several governmental *madrasas* started but no more than nine such schools have ever existed.

During the period from mid 1930s up to mid-seventies the Islamic and modern educational systems lived on side by side, seemingly in peace. Local communities continued to run elementary Islamic education in the mosques and in *madrasas* and the government slowly expanded a modern education system. From the fifties there was provision for girls, mainly in the cities. Islamic subjects were included also in modern education.

By the end sixties modern education had increasingly produced "revolutionaries", particularly in the (few) cities. These rebel students were of two kinds, one group influenced by the Communist parties in the Soviet Union and China and another affected by Islamist movements in the surrounding and Arabic countries. With the

Soviet invasion the Communist faction gained power and ruled from 1978 to1992. The Communist government introduced a modern education almost free from Islam (but with plenty of Communist propaganda) and wisely left the traditional *madrasas* to the local communities. The *madrasas* survived but kept a low profile during this period. The teachers were officially accused for backwardness and the students at higher levels called 'black reactionaries' (because of their black beards). However, the governmental *madrasas* remained; there was still need for Islamic judges as the *Sharia* system partially remained. The regime was careful not to allow these institutions to develop into resistance centres; heavy investments in Communist propaganda and the employment of only Communist teachers were among the means. Also during this period girls' education was at stake. Public pictures of girls dressed in short skirts with red neck-scarves and clenched fists were hardly cherished by the Afghan people, particularly in rural areas. Girl schools again closed down, this time due to lack of students.

The leadership of the *mujaheddin* in the resistance struggle (1979 -1992) often had often its origin among students and teachers in the Islamist movement. Modern schools popped up everywhere in liberated areas, including schools for girls. *Mujaheddin* soldiers acted as teachers or teacher trainers in low intensive fighting periods. Financial support was obtained from international NGOs. The Koran and Islamic subjects again played an important role in these schools and when the Communist government was replaced in 1992 the new curriculum dedicated around 30 per cent of the timetable to the Koran and Islamic subjects. Girls' education was allowed and officially promoted (but not so loudly) by the government but was still met with some reluctance by people in the rural areas[17]. The governmental plans for some 30 governmental madrasas, one in each province, were never realised.

That the Taliban, who emerged in 1994 after some chaotic civil war years, focussed on Islam in education and on girls' education in their policy is not surprising considering their extreme interpretation of Islam. Originally themselves students of Islam, it was only natural that their education aimed at making the young generation true followers of the right Islamic path - as interpreted by the Taliban themselves. With the very limited resources they possessed for anything else but fighting their

[17] It is well known that girls in almost all Third World countries attend school to a much lower extent than boys do. The reasons are also well known, are similar everywhere and are linked to poverty and traditional attitudes.

Islamic and Modern Education in Afghanistan - Conflictual or Complementary?

Pia Karlsson & Amir Mansory

Introduction

Afghanistan is among the countries with the lowest rates of enrolment in modern education and of adult literacy. At the same time, the country has a long tradition of Islamic education. This chapter describes the development of Islamic and modern education and the conflicts and tensions over the content and over girls' participation in modern education.

The Country

Afghanistan, located in the heart of Central Asia is one of the poorest countries in the world. GNP per capita was calculated to 164 US$ in 1998 and the human development index to 169 (out of 174). Life expectancy at birth is around 45 years; under five mortality rate is 257 per 1000. The population is estimated to 25 million inhabitants, of which some 2-3 million still live in exile. The main ethnic groups are Pashtuns (45-50 %), Tadjiks (30-35 %), Hazaras (5-10 %) and Uzbeks (5 %). 99 per cent are Muslims, 85-90 per cent are Sunni and 10-15 per cent are Shia Muslims. The country has two official languages, Pashtu and Dari[1] (UNDP, 2000; UNICEF 2001; CIA, 2000)

Many countries have experienced wars for long periods but few, if any, have suffered so immensely as Afghanistan. The destruction of the country was tremendous leaving practically nothing undistorted. Nearly 2 million people died, four million were disabled and one third of the population, around 6 million, fled the country for a refugee life, mostly in the neighbouring countries. In addition, several natural

[1] Dari is an Afghan version of Persian

educational ideas had only some limited impact the last years. People did not initially oppose them either; they brought the since long desired peace, law and order and their Islamic ideas were by no means alien to the ordinary (male and rural) Afghan. Their ban on girls' education was not adhered to in rural areas and it was only when they grossly exaggerated their Islamic revivalist ideas and actions (e.g. extreme public punishments and the explosion of Buddha statutes) that not only educated but also ordinary people turned against them.

In sum, from King Amanullah's time Afghan governments have tried to control Islamic education but their limited financial possibilities have restricted their controlling potentialities. It happened that madrasas rejected governmental support; one recent example is a very famous madrasa school in the province of Ghazni that in 1998 denied the Taliban government to involve financially.

With the interim administration installed in December 2002 the girls have returned to their schools in the cities but also rural schools have seen an increase of girl students. After only a few months at power, the curriculum was again changed so that the Koran and Islamic subjects now correspond to twelve per cent of the timetable, four hours out of 30. This is a measure that may please the international aid community but - considering the historical backlashes - it may affect the Afghan parents negatively. Islam cannot per definition be separated from the daily activities of human life, of which education is a part. Afghanistan is a profoundly Islamic country, proven e.g. by the fact that albeit the conflicts and wars between different factions of the society, no group has ever suggested a division of the country. All parties have advocated for one Afghanistan and for an Islamic Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Teaching in educational institutions has been widespread in Afghanistan and in many other Muslim countries for a millennium or more. The Islamic education reached wide layers of the population very early, although it struggled and still does with popular beliefs and superstition. Not always known is the fact that the Islamic schools quite often also included what is called 'secular' subjects, such as mathematics, reading and writing, literature and sometimes also vocational training.

Traditionally, local communities have been responsible for providing Islamic education but from the 20th century the governments have in various ways intervened,

mostly unsuccessfully[18]. The Taliban government tried to expand the modern *madrasa,* and included parts of primary school subjects into traditional Islamic education. In general however, the modern *madrasa* were fully implemented only rarely. Lack of textbooks and other school material and mullah-teachers with deficient knowledge of secular subjects were, together with a general disinterest among the people, the main causes.

Today, in spite of widespread illiteracy[19] next to all ordinary Afghan men and a majority of Afghan women are able to "read" the Koran, memorise some parts and posses knowledge of the basic Islamic rules and values. Islam is the cement that still keeps the Afghans together, in spite of all conflicts during the last decades.

For the Afghan Muslim, Islamic education is a duty as well as a right and few have the opinion that such education should be separated from the modern education. To develop the pedagogy for teaching Islam in primary schools so as to promote an *understanding* of Islam by e.g. developing pedagogical materials at children's level and in national languages is likely to be more in line with the views of the Afghan people than the reduction of hours for teaching Islam in the timetable in primary schools - something that again is on the governmental agenda

Traditional *madrasas* and possibly also modern *madrasas* will certainly remain in Afghanistan, particularly in areas where it takes a long time to establish primary schools or if the curriculum becomes too secularised. The fact that the name of the students in such schools (taliban) has been so soiled has today scared students from admitting that they attend a *madrasa* or even scared them away from attending at all. Outside pressure, aid dependency and internal power struggles may again affect the education system negatively. There is fear for a return to previous situations when Afghan values and culture as well as Islamic morals were neglected. The rebuilding of trust in modern education among rural people in the 1980s and 1990s, which resulted in an expansion of education also for girls in rural areas was to a large extent a result of the curriculum that was practiced in the primary schools. It was not the foreign money and support in the first hand that changed the attitudes towards education among the rural poor and paved the way for success but rather that parents with

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18 In neighbouring Pakistan, practically all madrasas are controlled and funded by the government.

19 Albeit high illiteracy rates, a good guess is that half of the population has command of basic numeracy.

confidence could send their children to a modern school that maintained the role of Islam. This experience must not be forgotten.

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disasters have devastated the country: floods, grasshoppers, earthquakes and in addition a severe draught lasting four years in a row. An almost total, next to inconceivable destruction of the country is the result.

Afghanistan is one of many developing countries but one that has not seen any development for decades. Afghanistan has not advanced as most other countries, it has not even stagnated - it has regressed. The industrial sector is asunder, exploitation of natural resources has collapsed, agricultural production has declined, the physical and administrative infrastructure has broken down, and the social sector has almost totally collapsed. The literacy rate, for men 45 per cent and for women 11 per cent, among the lowest in the world, was low also before the wars but even when compared with today's situation there were more schools and more students in schools 25 years ago. Although the Taliban fall in 2001 is bringing a change, at least in the cities, it is doubtful whether there is any other country with such a low literacy rate as Afghanistan. Moreover, the 'illiterate environment' in Afghanistan is conspicuous (although the Taliban fall in 2002 is bringing a change, at least in the cities): outside the few cities there are hardly any newspapers, magazines, bookshops, or libraries and very few written messages such as posters, advertisements, and signboards.

However, the country has a rich history of highly developed civilisations where art, literature and sciences have flourished. Written languages have existed for thousands of years. Population layers of the upper classes have been literate and have practised their literacy for centuries. Moreover, Islam has been dominating most parts of the country for 1,200 years or more, which implied that Islamic education has reached great parts of the population, also rural people living in remote areas. The Koranic education did not only teach the Koran but also reading, writing and counting were learnt by a number of rural villagers - i.e. boys and men. Islam also includes the S*haria* laws, which implies that legal regulations and legal documents have been spread and used also among illiterate people since long. These contradictory facts, the dominating 'illiterate environment' in combination with the 'literate history' and the since long existing Islamic education, make the educational situation in Afghanistan particular, maybe unique.

The history of Afghanistan goes back thousands of years. The country is connected with the old Persian and Turkic empires, with Alexander the Great, the Ghaznavid dynasty, Genghis Khan and others. Afghan tribes periodically invaded India and created vast Indo-Afghan empires. The Mogul dynasty ruled India from Kabul until the British

colonisation. In 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani was the first king selected by a *Loya Jirga*[2] and the first Afghan state was born. The Durrani clan ruled Afghanistan until 1973, when the country was declared republic.

Afghanistan was never colonised. All Afghans know that the British made three attempts to capture and hold Afghanistan and all Afghans are proud of the fact that all three attempts failed. At the end of the nineteenth century the state had been consolidated and strengthened, Islam was emphasised as a state religion and the country isolated itself from the West. In the early twentieth century the rulers tried to modernise the country, influenced i.a. by the development in Turkey. The first constitution was adopted and education opportunities were established, also for girls. During the reign of Afghanistan's last king, Zahir Shah[3] (1933-1973) the governmental power was reinforced, and a new constitution was adopted. By the end of the 1970s, the modern sector had grown considerably. An Islamist movement was crushed in 1975 and its leaders fled to Pakistan. In April 1978, Marxist sympathisers in the army, trained in Soviet Union, murdered the Prime Minister and seized power through a military coup. Widespread rural revolts followed. Soviet troops invaded the country in December 1979 and installed a puppet regime.

In 1989 the Soviet troops had to withdraw only to be followed by a long and brutal power struggle involving hundreds of local commanders. Anarchy and chaos dominated the entire country. This situation remained up to the end of 1994, when the Taliban (students of Islam) entered the arena and installed law and order - at the cost of human rights abuse. In particular women and girls in the cities were denied work and education opportunities. Foreign extremist Islamists infiltrated the Taliban movement and after the US bombings in the end of 2001 the Taliban lost power and were replaced by an interim administration. In June 2002 a new Islamic transitional government was appointed, which according to plans will lead the country up to 2004 when free elections will be held.

Islam in Afghanistan

In the development of Afghanistan from a tribal confederation till today's state religion and politics have been intimately connected. Islam has been the means for

[2] National council

unifying the country and for sanctioning both the absolute monarchy in the beginning of the last century and for the 're-sacralization' of the state by the Islamist movement (Olesen, 1995). Islam reached Afghanistan during the seventh century and gradually replaced the existing religions, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Islam spread rapidly all over the country with exception of the eastern part, Nuristan, where the inhabitants converted only in the end of the 19th century. Today, 99 per cent of all Afghans are Muslims. Islam is the basic cultural identity and defines the frame of reference for social morals, rights and obligations for all Afghans, regardless of ethnic origin. Islam influences all parts of life; in politics, in education, in science, in daily life at home, in the mosque, at office or in the field - references to the Koran and to the *hadiths* justify and motivate actions and opinions. "[F]ew Muslim peoples in the world observe the rituals and the piety of Islam with such regularity and emotion as the Afghan" (Rashid, 2000 p 82).

The first constitution (1964) confirms Islam in the country: "Islam is the sacred religion of Afghanistan" (cited in Samuelson, 1981). In the constitution of 1964 the Islamic judicial system, *Sharia*, is dominating but secularised law is also included (ibid.). It was not allowed to propagate for other religious beliefs but non-Muslims were allowed to practise their religion. The Communist regime in the 1980s had to retreat on the question of Islam and wrote in its constitution: "The Holy and Faithful religion of Islam will be respected, complied and protected in the People's Republic of Afghanistan; all Muslims are granted freedom to perform all the religious rites of Islam[4]" (Utas, B. in Davidsson, A. et al 1990).

The tribal and popular uprisings that have occurred throughout history have all been waged in the name of Islam. Rural mullahs have been at the core of these upheavals (Roy, O. in Maley, W. 1999). Islamism in Afghanistan, on the other hand recruited followers among the intelligentsia and modern urban people, also among educated women; it was rather a political ideology addressing politics, economics, culture and law than a religious revivalist movement (ibid.). It emerged in the mid sixties among the students of Kabul University; they launched a failed uprising in 1975 and they were at the core of the different *Mujaheddin* groups during the war against Soviet Union (ibid.). After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 their influence

[3] Zahir Shah returned from his exile to Afghanistan in 2002 and was appointed Father of the Nation. However, after a few months he return to exile in Italy.
[4] Translation by Pia Karlsson

decreased and after 1992 the Islamist ideology played just a small role in politics[5]. The Taliban movement was one of few radical Islamist movements rooted in a rural society[6]. The Taliban government (1996 - 2001) enforced Islam as a state religion by proclaiming Afghanistan as an Islamic Emirate and imposed an extremely strict interpretation of the *Sharia* law. The role of Islam and *Sharia* was hotly debated at the *Loya Jirga* in June 2002; several ministers assured that *Sharia* would still be the main legal system in the country.

The strict gender segregation has been strengthened in the last decades. With references to Islam the gender issue has been an issue in many insurrections and battles in Afghanistan. Often, when women's participation in education, for instance, has been enhanced, it has provoked counteractions.

Education in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan as in other Muslim countries education has a long history. Within the frame of Islam, education has existed for many centuries. Today, education includes three different categories: (i) traditional or indigenous (pre-Islamic), (ii) modern and (iii) Islamic education. Within the latter category, there are four types of Islamic schools in Afghanistan: Mosque schools; Traditional *madrasa*, first level; Traditional *madrasa*, second level; and Modern *madrasa.* In addition, so called Arabic schools have appeared from the eighties and onwards.

Traditional (indigenous) Education

When Louis Dupree (1973) travelled in Afghanistan in the 1960s and 1970s, he found Islam mixed with pre-Islamic customs; some were contradictory to the Koran, e.g. revenge and blood vengeance, even on fellow Muslims. Black magic, witches, *jinns* and *malangs*[7] existed parallel to Islamic practice. As an effect of the modernisation process (from the 60s) popular beliefs contradictory to Islam started to disappear, a

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[5] The Soviet troops were defeated and left the country in 1989 but the Communist puppet regime held its power over Kabul and some other cities until 1992.
[6] The rural origin is of importance when understanding the Taliban movement and its conduct in the capital of Kabul.

[7] A m*alang* is a holy man who wanders around the country and is thought to have been touched by the hand of Allah.

process that continued and was reinforced by the mobility and refugee experiences caused by the wars.

Education as the transmission of skills needed for survival in a subsistence agricultural or nomadic setting has of course occurred and been common in Afghanistan long before any formal education system was introduced. Teaching of skills, traditions and beliefs, values and culture is a kind of indigenous education transferred from generation to generation, often through oral transmission of poetry and stories. The stories usually have a moral message; they advice and counsel. Children (as well as other listeners) are expected to learn what is required by the individual with regards to responsibility and behaviour toward human beings and society. The overt or covert moralities include virtues such as honesty and kindness, respect and empathy. Children are taught the importance of unity, obedience and helpfulness. They are informed about *zakat*, about the obligation to share gained knowledge, to fight against oppression in all its forms and to struggle for equality.

In Afghanistan, the traditional, indigenous education also includes teaching about Islam. The non-formal Islamic education that is transmitted by adults and adolescents around the child consists of Islamic references on everyday issues and moral values. Also popular beliefs, some of which are alien to Islam, may be communicated as Islamic, even by some mullahs.

Virtues such as generosity, courage, kindness and hospitality are regarded as essential to become a good Muslim and constitute a considerable part of this indigenous education. The history of Islam and the life story of the Prophet are also included. The illiterate Afghan society has a living tradition of oral storytelling and poetry; many poems with origin in the classical Persian literature are known by heart among great layers of the population. The most well-known poet is Rumi, born in Balkh 1207. Compared to the classical Persian poetry the Pashtu literature is modest and of late appearance. The short poem of *landay* is a Pashtu popular poem, often anonymous and often aphoristic, satiric against power and superiority and when recited by women - against men (Forsberg, et al, 1995). Moreover, there are some 30-40 famous stories transmitted orally from generation to generation during hundreds of years. These stories are mostly told for small gatherings in private houses during long winter nights by a good storyteller, often an older man in the family. They deal with honesty and revenge, oppression and courage, honour and love. The aim was to have fun and sing and to keep the young boys and girls busy by educating them in good

manners, and caution them against bad habits. In the end of the 19th century many of these stories were compiled in a book called *Mili Hendara*, National Mirror. This book was available in almost every village (in Pashtu areas) and was read by a literate person while others were listening. In Dari speaking areas they read ancient books in Persian, e.g. *Gulistan* (Garden) by Sadi and a collection of verses by Hafiz (books, that still are part of the Islamic madrasa curriculum) written hundreds of years ago. They include Islamic moral issues and Islamic knowledge. Two of these books are also used in the mosque schools for children.

There are no particular initiation rites in Afghanistan. Circumcision is practised but only for boys and is not considered as any special event. It is not regarded as absolutely compulsory but most parents bring their boys in pre-school age to a hospital or clinic if available, or to a local "surgeon" for the operation. It is regarded as *sunna*, a tradition originated from the Prophet, and therefore beneficial

The indigenous education also strongly transmits the gender roles. Afghanistan is characterised by strict gender segregation and the girl is taught to prepare herself for marriage and learn useful domestic skills and the boy to be a protector of his family and family honour. The woman's primary sphere of interest is the domestic one; she should be a good caretaker and maintain the family's well-being while the man is the breadwinner and the provider of his family. The goal in life is a large family, preferably with many sons. These gender roles are often thought of as induced by Islam.

Islamic education

The formal Islamic education differs from the non-formal Islamic instruction in at least three aspects: 1) It takes place in a specific setting, usually in the mosque. Most mosques, even the very simple ones, have a special "classroom" for teaching and learning. 2) Not everyone is allowed to teach; a special teacher is appointed - namely the *mullah* of the mosque. 3) Written texts are used, always the Koran and the *hadiths* but sometimes also other kind of written literature.

Islamic education has a long tradition in Afghanistan. It began with the arrival of Islam. Various individuals, i.e. men considered to possess religious knowledge and experience have been teaching in the mosques for hundreds of years. Such Islamic schools were prevalent all over the country for many centuries (Amaj, 1991, Kamgar

1998, Rafi 1998). To learn the Holy Koran is the first objective. People, young and old, are then taught to memorise parts of the Koran. Memorisation of the Koran goes back to the time when the Prophet Mohammed, himself illiterate, was said to have received the Book orally from the Archangel Gabriel and recited it to his companions (Wagner, 1993). As the Koran is transmitting the direct words of God (in Arabic) it cannot be translated without risking falsifications; that is why Muslims all over the world learn the Koran in the Arabic language. One who can memorise the entire Koran is still a highly respected person in Afghanistan and is called *Kari*[8].

In the ancient Islamic schools reading, writing and arithmetic were also often included (Kamgar 1998, Rafi 1998). Moral education, such as the individuals' duties and obligations towards him/herself, the family and the society was also an important part; sometimes also vocational training such as calligraphy and accounting was included (Mansory, 2000).

Today, some children attend *madrasas* (only for boys) where they receive religious education and some children attend ordinary primary school, which also have several hours per week of Islamic education. Practically all children, boys and girls, attend a Koran or a Mosque School when they are in of pre-school age.

The ***Mosque School*** provides the elementary level of Islamic education. It provides a basic Islamic learning for all children in its neighbourhood. It is non-formal in character; it is not regularised and has no specific administrative or institutional rules. There are no entrance admission criteria, no fees, no examinations, and no certificates. There are mosque schools in all villages except some extremely poor and isolated communities where the population cannot afford a *mullah.* Besides teaching the Koran, these Mosque Schools prepare the children for the next educational stage (if there is any) inasmuch as they acquaint the small children with the type of activities and situations they will encounter. They learn to listen to the teacher, to take turns, to raise hands when asking etc., and they familiarise with letters[9] and some learn to read. There are also children who attend Mosque schools in addition to attendance in a primary school in the afternoons or weekends.

Virtually all children from four to five years of age attend the mosque school. The length of attendance is up to every individual but usually children stay there until

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[8] Originally, the *Karis* were graduates of a *Darulhifaz* (= "home for memorising the Koran"), where mostly blind people learned to memorise the Book.

[9] There is very little difference between the Arabic letters and the letters used in Dari and Pashto.

they commence the primary school or the *madrasa*, the modern or the traditional one. If no school exists in the neighbourhood the boys can continue for many years in the mosque school, with irregular attendance but girls tend to quit when they are around eleven to twelve years olds. Students pass through individually in their own pace. The classes can be quite big (and noisy!) - of up to 100 students.

The *mullah* teaches a couple of hours per day to those who appear in class. He is head of the mosque; informally "employed" by the surrounding community, i.e. by the people who inhabit the area "belonging" to the mosque. Besides teaching the children, the *mullah*'s duties include the guidance of the villagers in Islamic matters - men as well as women (but for the latter in reality only to a limited extent), leading the prayers, performing ceremonies at deaths and marriages, and suggesting names for the new-born. In Afghanistan, a man can be a *mullah* and simultaneously have another profession, farmer or businessman or whatever. A *mullah* is simply a learned person in the domain of Islam. The Afghan *imam*, like imams in other countries, leads the prayers. Sometimes the *imam* and the *mullah* are the same person, sometimes not. In some villages the mullah is paid through the *zakat* system, i.e. the Islamic tax collection system, where everyone should contribute with ten per cent of his income for financing collective needs and for assisting the poorest. If paid, the mullah's salary is more or less equivalent to the salary of a primary school teacher. Usually, however, there is no fixed salary rate - the villagers pay according to *zakat* in cash or in kind. The poorest have no obligation to pay anything but the *mullah* is obliged to guide and teach in any case. He has achieved more Islamic knowledge than others and therefore has a duty to share his knowledge.

It is generally agreed that every child should receive some basic Islamic education. Still today that means learning to read the Holy Koran, memorise some minor parts, to learn the five pillars of Islam, the prayers and the praying rituals as well as certain Islamic moralities and values. Before reading the Koran, children often use an alphabet book, called *Baghdadi Qaida,* the Baghdad Principle. It is phonetically organised and consists of Arabic phonemes and letters and the children learn all the phonemes one by one. After that starts the reading of the first part of the Koran, the first *separa*[10]. If one *separa* is learnt then all the others can easily be read too. Most children learn to read the Koran in two to three years. Often parts of the last

10 There are totally 30 *separas* in the Koran.

Islamic and Modern Education in Afghanistan - Conflictual or Complementary?

Pia Karlsson & Amir Mansory
Institute of International Education
Stockholm University

